

# Klamath Armory and Auditorium

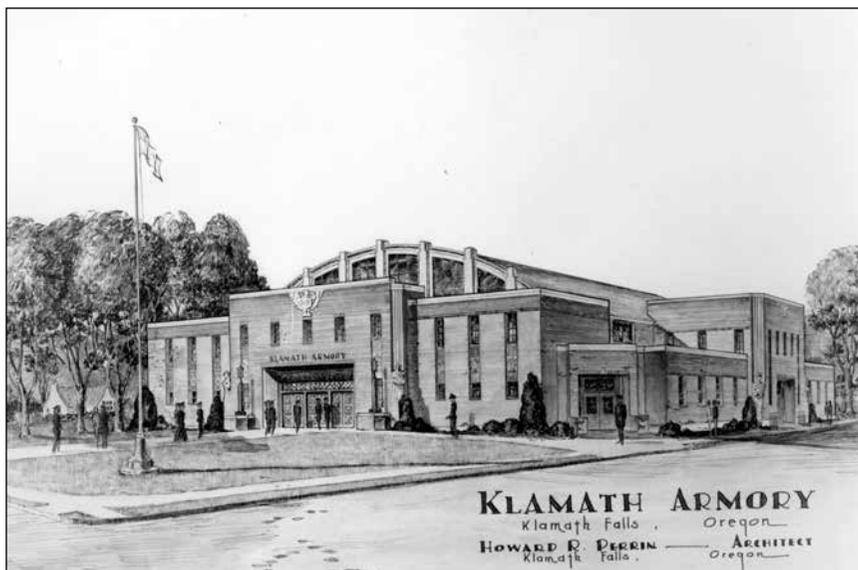
## *Klamath County Museum's "Biggest and Most Important Artifact"*

by Judith Hassen

WITH ITS 2011 LISTING in the National Register of Historic Places, the 1935 Klamath County Armory and Auditorium was recognized as the Klamath County Museum's "biggest and most important artifact."<sup>1</sup> When, in 1969, the City of Klamath Falls sold its half of the jointly owned 1935 Armory to Klamath County, members of the Klamath County Historical Society converted the building into the Klamath County Museum. The museum opened on February 22, 1970. On that day, 1,220 visitors pushed through the doors of the old armory to view the exhibits and see the familiar old armory in its new guise as museum. At the dedication ceremony, Gov. Tom McCall spoke about the museum's mission of displaying "living evidence of the dynamic lives that have been a part of our history."<sup>2</sup> The old armory's listing on the National Register of Historic Places, both for

local significance and architecture, adds the building to that "evidence of dynamic lives," because for over three decades this building hosted all the county's large-scale gatherings as well as many of its small ones.

Constructed with county and city funds, and a grant from the federal Public Works Administration, the Klamath Armory was one of only two armories in the state funded through both local entities — the other was the Portland Armory. The armory originally provided space for weekly drills and equipment storage for the Oregon National Guard's Battery D of the 249th Coast Artillery. It also had a complementary social function, providing space for large public gatherings. The people of Klamath Falls and Klamath County were so eager to use the new building that the first several events held there — a luncheon, a wrestling event, a boxing match, and a



*In 1934, Klamath County and the City of Klamath Falls hired architect Howard R. Perrin to design an armory building for military and public use. The resulting 1935 Klamath Armory building is pictured in this rendering by Perrin, which is archived at the Klamath County Museum along with a number of construction photographs and blueprints.*

concert — all occurred before the official dedication on November 11, 1935.

Prior to World War I, only eight armories existed in Oregon: the Portland Armory, built in 1891, and the Albany, Dallas, Woodburn, Salem, Ashland, Roseburg, and Eugene armories, all built between 1910 and 1915. After Congress passed the National Defense Act in 1916, requirements for the National Guard became more rigorous. Anticipating the United States' eventual involvement in World War I, the act authorized the president to federalize or mobilize the National Guard for overseas conflicts and to require service for the duration of the war. It also released federal funds to

pay for performing drills and other training, increasing yearly training requirements from five days of summer camp to not fewer than forty-eight days per year and at least fifteen days of annual training. National Guard units all over the country therefore ramped up preparations for war, building more armories and securing places to drill and store ammunition and arms. Between 1920 and 1935, the National Guard added eleven armories to Oregon's inventory: Marshfield (Coos Bay), McMinnville, Lebanon, Medford, Tillamook, Silverton, Cottage Grove, Newberg, Springfield, Hillsboro, and Klamath Falls.<sup>3</sup> The Klamath Armory was the sole National

Guard armory constructed east of the Cascades until after World War II. Population density considerations and difficult geographical constraints contributed to delayed armory construction in eastern Oregon; the latter was of particular consequence in the case of Klamath Falls.

Originally named Linkville for its location at the south end of the Link River, Klamath Falls is bordered on the west by the Cascade Mountains and to the east by desert. The Link River's mile-and-a-quarter-long watercourse connects Upper Klamath Lake with Lake Ewauna and Lower Klamath Lake, a region initially inhabited by Modoc and Klamath tribes, and later Paiutes (also called Yahooskin). Waterfowl and shorebirds came to those lakes, part of the Pacific Flyway, by the millions. Salmon followed the Klamath River up from the Pacific Ocean to the lakes, and along with suckers and trout, provided a rich food source for the inhabitants. The region's lakes and waterways attracted Euro-American settlers, trappers, military men, and prospectors in the early nineteenth century. Fort Klamath was established in 1863 (during the Civil War and four years after Oregon became a state) and was manned by local militia to provide protection for the Southern Route of the Oregon Trail, also known as the Applegate Trail. A treaty between the Klamath Tribes and the United States was signed at Council Grove, near Fort Klamath, on October 14, 1964. Linkville, established in 1867 along the bank of the Link River, expanded east and grew to include schools, churches, and government buildings. By 1893,

residents believed the name no longer represented the new population and changed it to Klamath Falls.<sup>4</sup>

Newcomers arriving to town traveled by foot, horseback, and canoe (later paddle wheelers), or by wagon, carriage, or stage coach until the Southern Pacific railroad built a new train route through Klamath Falls in 1909.<sup>5</sup> The railroad provided a route for delivering Klamath products to market, carrying livestock, agricultural products, and lumber south to Sacramento and San Francisco. As Klamath Falls became known for its rich resources, more people moved into the area. The county grew rapidly, nearly tripling the population in ten years — from 11,413 in 1920 to 32,407 in 1930. Census numbers show the city population nearly quadrupled in the same time span: 4,801 in 1920 to 16,093 in 1930. The Natron Cutoff railroad line, completed in 1926, connected Klamath Falls to Eugene and points north and allowed lumber production to skyrocket. That lumber boom set Klamath Falls and Klamath County apart economically from other areas in the country.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the stock market crash in October 1929 and the onset of the Great Depression, Klamath Falls spent \$1.7 million on building construction and ranked third in the state in 1929. That year, several fine banks, hotels, and other commercial buildings were constructed in downtown Klamath Falls, including the six-story Oregon Bank Building at Ninth and Main streets, the First National Bank at Sixth and Main streets, the Balsiger Ford Motor Company building at

Esplanade Avenue and Main Street, and the Elks Hotel at Eleventh and Main streets. Poole's Pelican Theater opened that year, as did the Piedmont Golf and Country Club. On May 10, 1930, the Klamath Falls *Evening Herald* reported "Klamath Falls [is the] fastest growing town in [the] U.S.," as building permit applications set records in the planning office, new stores opened, a new airport was built, and bids were issued for a new post office and other government buildings. The need for a large public gathering space to accommodate the growing population soon became acute.<sup>7</sup>

The Klamath Falls National Guard unit, the 249th Coast Artillery, one of six coast artillery batteries in Oregon, formed as Battery D in September 1927, also struggled with inadequate facilities. Oregon State Representative Andrew M. Collier complained in 1929 that "the company at Klamath Falls was organized two years ago and is meeting in a frame building. We have about \$25,000 worth of equipment with improper facilities of caring for it. General White will bear me out in the statement that our company is the 'crack' outfit of the state and enjoys the highest rating. There is no armory in Eastern Oregon and Klamath County is entitled to an armory if anybody is."<sup>8</sup>

By 1930, public sentiment and political will were united in the desire for an armory at Klamath Falls. The city and county both donated land located in the southeast portion of Block 8 of the Hot Springs Addition (1451 Main Street) for the armory site. Oregon law at that time stipulated that if local sources could provide 50 percent of

the cost of an armory, the state would fund the remaining expenses. Klamath Falls proposed a bond of \$45,000 and Klamath County proposed a direct tax of \$45,000. Together, the sum would constitute half the \$180,000 initial budget. The initiative enjoyed widespread support. A three-quarter-page ad titled "Vote for your Armory" in the November 1, 1930, *Evening Herald* included endorsements from all over the county. Ballot Measure 502-503 went before the voters on November 2, 1930, and passed by a tally of 1,178 to 672 in the city and 2,205 to 1,647 in the county.<sup>9</sup>

The National Guard members deserve much of the credit for the overwhelming success of the ballot measure because they worked to increase awareness of the need for an armory and its performance as a unit brought praise to Klamath Falls and Klamath County. The Klamath Falls National Guard unit, Battery D, was highly involved with the town during that time. The National Guard soldiers stood at attention for review by visiting Gov. Albin Walter (A.W.) Norblad. The local newspaper reported on the unit's activities, noting: "Battery D Ready for Encampment," "Battery D 249th Coast Artillery . . . will leave tomorrow . . . for summer encampment," and "Klamath crack battery joins other troops on the Troop Train." When Battery D held a military ball to raise money to rent quarters for drill and materiel storage, the soldiers advertised themselves as the entertainment.<sup>10</sup> Before the armory was constructed, entertainment took place in whatever venue could be procured.



*In this photograph, Battery A of the 249th Coast Guard Artillery work with large harbor defense guns, holding twelve-inch mortars, at Fort Stevens, Oregon. Fort Stevens was one of the few places on the West Coast that were shelled by the Japanese during World War II. This photograph belonged to Louis Della Costa, a National Guardsman from Klamath Falls, and was brought to the Klamath County Museum in 2002 for inclusion in a World War II exhibit.*

Some venues were small, some were a considerable drive from town, some were uniquely unsuited to the type of entertainment being offered, and some were too expensive for the general public.<sup>11</sup> City and county residents needed a space large enough to be inclusive. The notion of a new armory serving two functions — as an auditorium and military facility — seemed the perfect solution.

Due to the economic effects of the Great Depression, the state could not afford to match half the cost of the Klamath Armory as originally planned. R.E. Bradbury, a local member of the public works committee,

suggested that armory proponents submit plans to the newly established Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works for funding consideration.<sup>12</sup> President Franklin D. Roosevelt established the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, or the Public Works Administration (PWA) as it was known after 1935, as part of his “New Deal” initiative to stimulate economic growth and job creation during the Great Depression. The PWA was a financing agency that extended grants, or a combination of grants and loans, directly to states and local governments for constructing facilities dedicated to public use.

Typical grants funded 45 percent of the total cost of the project. As explained by Christine Curran:

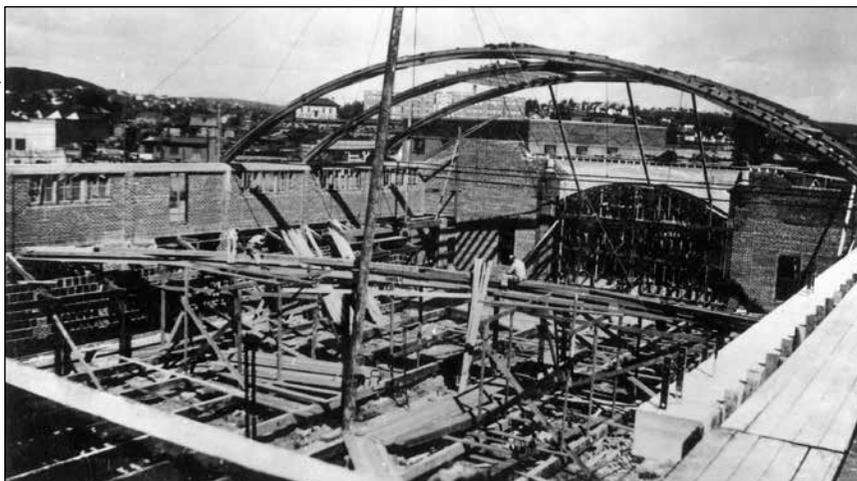
In general, the PWA accepted projects estimated to cost over \$25,000. To apply for grants, applicants submitted project proposals to one of seven regional PWA offices around the country. Once approved, an inspector from the agency's engineering division reviewed bids and specifications accompanying each project and attended bid openings to ensure grantees followed proper procedures. Aside from occasional site inspections, PWA officials had no involvement in project construction. Applicants handled all hiring through the private sector. The only limitation the PWA placed on hiring was that preference be given to qualified workers on relief. Typically, thirty percent of the labor force on a PWA project came from the relief rolls.<sup>13</sup>

Armory proponents sent their application to Marshall N. Dana, Regional Advisor for the PWA office headquartered in Portland. Dana forwarded the application to Washington, D.C. By the middle of January 1934, word arrived in Klamath Falls that the PWA had approved a \$30,700 grant for the construction of Federal Public Works Project No. 1825, the Klamath County Armory. The Oregon State Legislature submitted a bill requesting one dollar from the state, thus complying with the Oregon law requiring state involvement in funding armories. The Klamath County Armory was one among 400 armories funded by the PWA throughout the United States between 1935 and 1943.<sup>14</sup>

The PWA's \$30,700 grant and the city-county contributions (the county's tax pool had grown to \$49,000 by this time) constituted the Klamath Armory's construction budget, set at

\$124,700. The city and county both added small amounts above and beyond their original commitments in order to complete and furnish the Armory, and they hired architect Howard R. Perrin to design the armory, work he completed in 1934. Perrin was no stranger to the region. Born in Rhode Island, he had left an architectural practice in Boston to relocate to Klamath Falls in 1922. He opened a practice in town that continued for forty-seven years. During the fifteen years between 1926 and 1940, Perrin designed no fewer than nineteen new buildings in Klamath Falls alone, in addition to five major remodeling projects. Perrin worked with contractor Edward P. Brosterhaus of Bend on the project.<sup>15</sup>

Perrin's final design for the Klamath Armory consisted of a 25,576 square-foot two-story concrete, brick, and steel-frame building with a partial basement, two upper stories, and a central drill hall with a vaulted roof. The dramatic, eighty-foot-wide drill hall and auditorium featured two-story, steel framework, brick and clay-tile walls, and mechanically laminated wood arches.<sup>16</sup> Perrin took a slightly different approach to traditional armory floor plan designs, which placed the "head shed," or administrative functions, in front of the "drill shed," or drill hall. At the Klamath Armory, Perrin placed administrative areas on the left side of the building, separated by a private hallway from the drill hall. These programming changes are significant because they signal the building's dual use — for military and public entertainment purposes. A hallway on the east side of the drill hall provided access to rooms



*This 1935 photograph documents the drill hall arches under construction. Separate pieces of wood are bolted together to form the mechanically laminated arches; tie rods crossing the span hold the bases of the arches together.*

available to the public. The private side contained the captain's office, lieutenant's office, orderly's room, showers, locker and toilet rooms, a mat room for wrestling, a fortified weapons storage area, a large truck entrance, and a supply room. The partial basement housed a rifle range. The instruction room and banquet room and kitchen were located on the east, or public, side of the building, above which were the plotting room and an apartment for the employee responsible for protecting the National Guard's equipment.<sup>17</sup>

Perrin designed the building to include an entertainment function, which would ultimately become the prevalent use of the armory. Public rooms in the armory were available for rental. Five public entrances, located in the front center, at each front corner, in the middle of the east side, and at

the northeast corner of the building all provided access to the "drill shed," or drill hall, which also served as an auditorium. Perrin located a large stage with a dressing room on each side on the north end of the drill hall. Stadium seating in the balcony on the other three sides of the hall guaranteed spectators clear views of the floor and the stage. Large compartments under the balconies provided storage for chairs.<sup>18</sup> Officials looked forward to the building's dedication, because they hoped income generated from armory rentals and from the National Guard would contribute over 50 percent of its annual allotment for upkeep and maintenance. The federal government also contributed to operations, providing funding for a night watchman to protect government materiel stored in the Armory.<sup>19</sup>

Work began in earnest in 1934, once funding was secured, and Perrin “estimated the armory to be ninety percent complete” by July 19, 1935. Perrin designed the Klamath Armory in the popular “Modernistic” style, a melding of traditional and modern forms. The style is known today by a variety of terms, including Planar Classical, Starved or Stripped Classical, and Classical Moderne:

[It is] characterized by classical massing and form; flattened, unadorned exteriors; and richly decorated interiors. Art historian Eva Weber includes Classical Moderne as one of the three “distinct but related design trends of the 1920s and 1930s” encompassed by the term “Art Deco.” The other two are Zigzag Moderne, known for high and angular ornament[ation], and Streamlined Moderne, with its porthole windows and round corners. The Classical Moderne was “a more

conservative style” than its two Art Deco counterparts, “blending a simplified and monumental modernistic neoclassicism with a more austere form of geometric and stylized relief sculpture and other ornament.”<sup>20</sup>

Classical Moderne architecture is closely associated with the New Deal because it was employed in many buildings funded or built by federal programs, such as the PWA. Building examples in this style are typically symmetrical and balanced in appearance. Often horizontally structured, they are more sedate in form than the zigzag forms that preceded them and less streamlined than those that followed. The Klamath Armory is stylistically more similar to later forms of Art Deco, lacking the towers traditionally associated with Victorian armories and earlier Art Deco architecture. The



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*Howard Perrin designed the Klamath Armory and Auditorium in the Classical Moderne style, featuring classical building arrangements with stripped down or stylized details. The cast stone eagle sculpture above the entrance and soldier pilasters represent the armory’s purpose, while reflecting a more modern style typical of buildings constructed with Public Works Administration (PWA) funds.*



*Cast-stone soldier sculptures are incorporated into fluted pilasters that flank the building's southern and eastern entrances. The soldiers are depicted in uniforms available during 1935, which were largely leftovers from World War I.*

painted ceiling in the Klamath Armory foyer, a stylized floral design, and the cast-stone exterior statuary are also typical of Classical Moderne styling and conveyed the building's purpose and significance to Klamath Falls.<sup>21</sup> Perrin chose brick cladding to create an impression of mass and substance. It also assisted the community, because it was locally sourced from Klamath Brick and Tile Company.<sup>22</sup> The wide Classical Moderne facade of the building captured some of the New Deal's sense of confidence: solid and safe, but accessible — as welcoming as a community center as it was upright and strong as an armory.

The November 9, 1935, *Evening Herald's* front page informed readers that Monday would bring “the most elaborate Armistice Day celebration held in Klamath Falls for years,” because the “dedication of the Klamath Armory adds to the importance of the occasion.” The all-day program began with Reveille at sunrise and included a parade, a band, invocations, speeches, Armistice Day exercises, distinguished guests, the armory dedication, an afternoon hot dog feed with children's races — followed by a banquet — then a military ball. The article continued with this praise: “The local unit of the National Guard (Battery D 249th Coast Artillery) are to be complimented on their new home, as it was mainly through the efforts of the officers of Battery D that Klamath Falls now has this wonderful addition to our municipal buildings.” The list of merchants who closed their businesses that day in honor of the celebration filled two columns.<sup>23</sup>

Initially, residents and local organizations used the armory for dances, club events, and sporting events. Mack Lillard, a local boxing and wrestling promoter, leased the Armory for sporting events beginning in September 1935. “Rough Greek” Harry Demetral of Chicago fought “Russian Lion” Al Karasick of Portland in the first wrestling match in the Klamath Armory. Wrestling had taken on a theatrical flair by the 1930s and was drawing huge crowds. In the days before television, people had to go to arenas to watch matches. The armory provided a place in Klamath Falls for those events with an excellent view of the ring from

every seat. As reported in an October 2, 1935, *Evening Herald* article, the first Armory wrestling match attracted an estimated 2,000 people, making it one of “the largest indoor crowds ever gathered in Klamath Falls.”<sup>24</sup> The wrestling dramas included stars, such as Gorgeous George and Jumping Joe Savoldi (best known for the flying dropkick), tag-teams, wrestling bears, foreign wrestlers, women wrestlers, and judo. The crowds often got into the act, throwing popcorn and peanuts and even fighting among themselves. A few notable wrestling matches held at the armory include: “Terrible” Ted Christy against Ken Hollis; “Dude Chick” facing “Sockeye McDonald”; and the Lady Champion wrestler beat-

ing of the “Mexican” in a wild struggle. There was even an alligator, but the lady wrestler, Clara Mortenson, turned out to be Bruno Mostig. The promoter, Mack Lillard, was also responsible for providing referees. Red Britton, a famous Klamath County sheriff, both boxed and refereed.<sup>25</sup>

Along with professional wrestling, boxing, and judo, amateur sports flourished in the armory. George Demetrakos, a Klamath Falls resident who spent much of his youth in the Klamath Armory, recalled how kids were allowed to go into the ring and fight before a professional bout; the crowd would throw money into the ring for them.<sup>26</sup> From those ranks, and from the local Golden Gloves



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*Rich interior details, such as the stylized floral murals on the Klamath Armory’s ceilings, are also typical of the Classical Moderne style.*

program, rose the young fighters of Klamath Falls, including Rudy Carlson and Ralph Weiser.<sup>27</sup>

Packing the Armory was no small feat — the drill hall could accommodate almost 3,000 people at one time — but that is exactly what happened almost immediately following its opening. Residents of the Klamath Basin and surrounding areas came to the Klamath Armory to dance and listen to music played by both local and nationally known musical artists. Bands passing through Klamath Falls on the train, or on The Dalles-California Highway (current U.S. 97) traveling from San Francisco to Portland or Seattle, would often stop

for the night and play the armory, taking Duke Ellington's lead after he and his Famous Orchestra played there on March 3, 1940. After that, some of the biggest names in the bright lights of New York, Nashville, San Francisco, and Los Angeles were heard and seen in the Klamath Armory, albeit usually on a Monday or a Wednesday night. Whether they were swaying to the sounds of the Big Bands or doing the West Coast Swing, dancers at the Armory were having a wonderful time. In his role as promoter, Baldy Evans brought a variety of bands to the Klamath Armory in addition to Duke Ellington, The Sons of the Pioneers, Tex Williams, Lawrence

Klamath County Museum



*In this photograph taken on May 8, 1965, Murray "Red" Britton referees a match during a boxing exhibition at the Klamath Armory and Auditorium. Britton was a famous Klamath County sheriff who also boxed in matches at the armory.*

**"BALDY" EVANS PROUDLY PRESENTS**  
**"THE BLUES BOY"**  
**B. B.**  
**KING**  
 and his recording  
**ORCHESTRA**



**"ON MY WORD OF HONOR" "SWEET LITTLE ANGEL"**  
**"WOKE UP THIS MORNING" "YOU UPSET ME BABY"**  
 and featuring  
**ELMORE "THE VOICE" MORRIS**  
**ARMORY**  
**WED., JAN. 30**

*During the 1940s and 1950s, promoter Baldy Evans often brought to Klamath Armory big-name performers, including Duke Ellington and Lawrence Welk. Klamath Falls newspapers printed ads for those events titled "Baldy Evans Proudly Presents," such as this January 23, 1957, advertisement for B.B. King in the Herald and News.*

Welk, Paul Whiteman, Gene Krupa, Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, Bob Wills, and Hank Thompson. Hundreds of ads reproduced in the Klamath Falls newspapers include the phrases "Baldy Evans Proudly Presents" or "Another Baldy Evans Attraction." When big-name bands were not performing,

Baldy's Band and other local bands were always available. Mostly hosting music popular at the time, the armory saw Big Bands and Western bands in the 1940s, then Rock-and-Roll and R&B bands in the 1950s and 1960s, including "Fats" Domino, Little Richard, Chuck Berry, Fats Waller, and B.B.

**STARTS TONIGHT**

**4 -- Big Days -- 4**

Through Sunday, June 5  
**MATINEES**  
 Fri., Sat., Sun. - 2:15 P. M.  
**MITES**  
 Doors Open 7:00 - Show 8:15

Junior Cham. of Comm.  
**POLACK Bros.**  
**CIRCUS**

SEE:  
 • Capt. Dick Clarence Lined  
 • Pattenberg's Band  
 • Robert Castle - International Ice Artist  
 • The Hollywood Performing Elephants  
 • Benny Moore's Dign and Food  
 • Skatell's Black Horse Troupe  
 • Mary Street Arts  
 The Mightiest Aggregation of World Wide Wonders



**2 1/2** Mrs. Thrill Packed  
**ENTERTAINMENT**

**ARMORY**

Sets at  
**1100 - 75c - 1100**  
 Inc. Tax

*Because the concrete-reinforced floors designed to handle National Guard artillery exercises were also strong enough to withstand the weight of elephants, the Klamath Armory building was well suited for circus performances. On June 3, 1948, the Herald and News promoted the Polack Bros. Circus at the armory.*

King. During World War II, soldiers came to dance at the Klamath Armory from Camp Abbott (near Sunriver), Camp Sherman (near Metolius), and Camp White (near Medford) as well as from Klamath Falls' Naval Air Station, Marine Barracks, and Guard units.<sup>28</sup> Circuses found the Armory uniquely suited to handle their specialty performances — the concrete-reinforced hardwood floor that held up under the Guard's artillery was strong enough to handle elephants, too. The Ken Jensen Circus came for several years running, beginning in 1959. Interviews with locals reveal that the famous Polack Brothers Circus came to the armory for many years, beginning in the late 1930s.<sup>29</sup> During the 1930s and 1940s, circuses would fill the armory for up to a week at a time.<sup>30</sup>

Auto shows, furniture shows, agricultural fairs, and fund-raising events also appeared regularly at the armory through the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. The Elks Women's Annual Crab Feed, where men served the women, as well as its counterpart, the Elks Men's Annual Crab feed, were popular annual events. Well-known bands such as Tommy Allan and his Orchestra lent their names to events such as the Fireman's Ball and other fundraisers. Annual stockholders' meetings for the Production Credit Association always included luncheon for around 500 people, and political rallies, local and national, drew crowds, especially Mark Hatfield's Old Fashioned Ice Cream Social.<sup>31</sup>

Boy Scout Jamborees, Ice Frolics — all the big events took place in the armory. But it also played host

to smaller, homespun events, such as club meetings of all sorts. Chess, teen, quilting, karate, judo, and square dancing clubs all met regularly at the armory. Between scheduled events, the drill hall served as a basketball court. A small equipment room stored basketballs and other sports equipment. Adult basketball leagues rented the armory for tournaments, and the profits helped pay the building's expenses. Local city, church, and institutional leagues played each other and outsiders. For years, Thursday night in the Armory was League night. The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) was located in the armory, having started as a Boys Club there. Athletic clubs and dancing clubs met, and continue to meet, in the armory.<sup>32</sup>

Through all the public activity in the armory, Battery D's presence was constant until 1940. Each week, troops practiced close drill and marksmanship and worked to learn every facet of the artillery. In 1935, Capt. Van Vactor was Battery D's first commander to use the new armory. From January 12, 1937, Capt. Theodore D. Case commanded Battery D until the National Guard divided Klamath Falls battery into Batteries A and C, commanded by Capt. John F. Olin and Capt. George D. Powell respectively. Case became Executive Officer of the First Battalion.<sup>33</sup>

On September 16, 1940, Batteries A and C were federalized, ordered to active duty, and relocated to Camp Clatsop (now Camp Rilea) to serve at Fort Stevens as harbor defense in anticipation of the United States' entry into World War II.<sup>34</sup> It was a rough start for the troops, though. Batteries A and

C reported for travel at the Klamath Armory, anticipating the trip to Camp Clatsop, but the troop trains did not arrive for five days. During the wait, they marched up Main Street three times a day to eat at a local restaurant, practiced close drill and marksmanship, worked on physical fitness, and slept on the Armory floor. It made the mess hall and the hard cots at Camp Clatsop a welcome change.<sup>35</sup>

Klamath Falls troops made their first visit home as a group for a weekend in early October 1941. The 249th Coast Artillery band came with them to play for the associated parade and football game "and the 200-odd young men ran into one of the warmest welcomes ever given here."<sup>36</sup> Manning Fort Stevens, which was one of the few West Coast sites actually shelled by the Japanese during World War II, utilized all of Batteries A and C of the 249th Coast Artillery until the threat to the West Coast was downgraded and the need for soldiers in other theaters increased. Many local National Guardsmen were then transferred to other services.<sup>37</sup>

The Klamath Falls Armory continued to perform numerous military functions during the absence of the National Guard. Over 3,176 volunteers signed up for World War II in the Armory, first in a group registration, then later in the Captain's Office, which many museum directors have since made their office. Where people paint and dance today, volunteers rolled bandages, led bond sale drives, and wrote letters. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, then-Governor Charles A. Sprague recognized the potential need for local protection and orga-

nized the Oregon State Guard (OSG) to assume the local role of the National Guard. The Klamath Falls unit of OSG Company C of the 19th Battalion drilled in the Klamath Armory and trained so it could “perform competently the duties it may be called on to perform.”<sup>38</sup> Before the United Service Organizations (USO) came to town, some young women formed a group called “The Klamath Commandos.” They marched in parades, hosted a local servicemen’s club, and raised money by selling beverages at events at the Armory to support their Wounded Servicemen’s Project. This initiative brought soldiers, sailors, and marines from hospitals to Klamath County, where they were housed with locals, feted, and thanked. Many doctors used the lure of a visit to Klamath Falls to inspire their patients to get well soon.<sup>39</sup>

The State Guard controlled all National Guard armories in Oregon by 1944, with the exception of Ashland and Woodburn, because OSG units no longer occupied the buildings. On June 30, 1948, General Rilea, the Oregon Adjutant General, mustered out the remaining units of the Oregon State Guard, “and the local National Guard came home.”<sup>40</sup> In the early 1950s, artillery used by the local National Guard unit outgrew the Klamath Armory, and the unit moved to Kingsley Field. At that time, the building’s function shifted exclusively to an event facility. The word *Armory* was removed from the building’s name, and the Klamath “Auditorium” continued to draw crowds with big-name wrestling shows and popular musicians.

Community needs were also changing, and the YMCA moved on to its own building. The National Guard built a new armory on Shasta Avenue in 1961. Television became a common form of entertainment, and wrestling and boxing matches could be watched at home without having to drive to town. Even though some professional and amateur sports events used the Auditorium into the 1960s, the overall drop in income during that time was a devastating financial blow for the Klamath Auditorium. Eventually, the Klamath County commissioners determined the building was not supporting itself with the few club rentals and activities remaining. Members of the building committee discussed many options for the continued use of the building; one suggestion was to make it the home of the Babe Ruth Little League. Another suggestion was to make it the new home of the Klamath County Museum.<sup>41</sup>

By 1969, the Klamath County Museum had outgrown its exhibit space, which it shared with the county library. The city and county wanted to consolidate their libraries and suggested moving the museum into the old city library building. But that did not solve the museum’s problems, especially given that museum funds had paid for over half the cost of the joint library-museum. The city agreed to sell its half of the Armory to the county for \$1.00. Klamath County and the City of Klamath Falls, like a few other communities across the country, chose to use the old armory for a new purpose. As noted by David Super in *Still Serv-*

ing: *Reusing America's Historic National Guard Armories*, "charmed by their distinctive architecture and historical presence, several communities across the country have hushed the bulldozer's roar by finding new uses for these aging armories, ranging from school buildings and family resource centers to libraries and museums."<sup>42</sup> Carol Mattos, past president of the Klamath County Historical Society, attended the opening of the museum in 1970. Accustomed as she had been to the cramped quarters of the joint museum-library, her lasting impression was of the new museum's expanded exhibit space: "There was so much room."<sup>43</sup>

Museum staff soon found that the spaces inside the Klamath Armory were less compatible to the business of a museum than they had hoped. The vast arching roof made the former drill hall difficult and expensive to heat. The new tenants built bases and partitions to divide the huge area into manageable spaces, obscuring the stage. Paneling covered the green ceramic tile wainscoting in the lobby. Museum staff constructed a floor over the stadium seating at the south end of the building to create a museum library upstairs. The large stairways leading to the balconies were closed in, limiting access upstairs to staff or authorized visitors. The southwest entrance was bricked-up to form a vault. Workers covered over the windows in the face of the arch and painted black the clerestory windows to prevent uv damage to the artifacts. In the 1970s, the museum converted the building to geothermal heat.<sup>44</sup>

And yet, for all the enthusiasm exercised in the name of improvement, the changes caused little permanent damage to the building. With some exceptions, changes were relatively minor, and many are proving to be reversible. The black paint has been removed from the clerestory windows, which are now covered with uv film, allowing a view of the drill hall's interior. Cases were moved, allowing access to and visibility of the stage, and the museum is developing plans to uncover the arch windows. The future looks bright for the Klamath Armory. Its recent listing in the National Register of Historic Places celebrates its architectural and historical distinction and publicly recognizes the community's commitment to this well-loved place.

On the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Klamath Armory's dedication, museum staff and volunteers celebrated with a partial reenactment of the original dedication program. On Veteran's Day, November 11, 2010, a re-dedication ceremony followed a parade with bands and Armistice Day exercises. Commanding officers, Capt. Michael Whalen of the Klamath Falls Army National Guard and Col. Jim Miller of the Klamath Falls Air National Guard accepted plaques commemorating the roles filled by their predecessors. All county commissioners and a city council member spoke to audiences that included commanding officers of the Klamath Falls local National Guard unit and many past and current Guard members. And, just like their predecessors in 1935, they all stayed for the hot-dog feed.<sup>45</sup>

## NOTES

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1. Judith Hassen and Cara Kaser, "Klamath County Armory and Auditorium," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (Salem: State Historic Preservation Office, Oregon Parks and Recreation, 2011), 20.
2. "McCall Dedicates County Museum," *Klamath Falls Herald and News*, February 23, 1970, pp. 1, 3. For information on the Klamath County Museum, see <http://museum.klamathcounty.org>.
3. "Biennial Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Oregon to the Governor and Commander-in-Chief" (various issues), Offices of the State Adjutant General archives, Departments of the Army and Air Force National Guard of Oregon, Salem, Oregon.
4. See Robert Donnelly, "George Nurse, Founder of Linkville," Oregon Historical Society Oregon History Project, [http://www.ohs.org/education/oregonhistory/historical\\_records/dspDocument.cfm?doc\\_ID=13FDAEE2-0D8E-8F59-72C579404331FE76](http://www.ohs.org/education/oregonhistory/historical_records/dspDocument.cfm?doc_ID=13FDAEE2-0D8E-8F59-72C579404331FE76) (accessed November 17, 2014); and William G. Robbins, "Lower Klamath Lake," *The Oregon Encyclopedia*, [http://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/lower\\_klamath\\_lake/#.vGpFQMmJY6A](http://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/lower_klamath_lake/#.vGpFQMmJY6A) (accessed November 17, 2014).
5. Hassen and Kaser, "Klamath County Armory," 13.
6. Jack Bowden, *Railroad Logging in the Klamath Country* (Hamilton, Mont.: Oso Publishing, 2003), 16–17.
7. *Evening Herald*, May 10, 1930, 1; and *Evening Herald*, January 10, 1930.
8. *Evening Herald*, February 7, 1929.
9. Sheilah DeBlander, "History of the 1935 Klamath County Armory," (Senior thesis, Southern Oregon University, 2003), 14; *Evening Herald*, November 1, 1930; and *Evening Herald*, November 3, 1930.
10. *Evening Herald*, May 6, 1930, 6; *Evening Herald*, June 9, 1930, 1; *Evening Herald*, June 14, 1930, 5; *Evening Herald*, May 1, 1930, 3.
11. Hassen and Kaser, "Klamath County Armory and Auditorium," 18.
12. See DeBlander, "History of the 1935 Klamath County Armory," 3–4, quoted in Hassen and Kaser, "Klamath County Armory," 14–15.
13. Christine Curran, "Winona City Hall," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (State Historic Preservation Office: St. Paul, Minn., 1999), section 6, p. 8.
14. David Super, Julia Miller, and Renee Hylton, *Still Serving: Reusing America's Historic National Guard Armories* (Washington, D.C.: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2000), 17.
15. Richard Ellison Ritz, *Architects of Oregon: A Biographical Dictionary of Architects Deceased — 19th and 20th Centuries* (Lair Hill Publishing, 2003), 314–315. According to the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office's historic sites database, Perrin is also credited for designing the Willard Hotel, Jim's Tire Service, Chambers Building, Audley Apartments, Hillside Hospital, Main Fire Station, Montgomery Ward Building, Klamath County Jail, American Legion Veterans Memorial, Golden Rule Building, Murray Building, Wayman Building, Wicker Works, Johnson-Collier Building, Hirvi Building, Bussard Building, Claude Daggett House, and Harry Moe House. His major remodels include the Henry Grimes Building, Imperial Garage, Maguire Building, Stewart-Drew Building, and Loyal Order of Moose Lodge 1106.
16. Mechanically laminated arches are bolted together, rather than glued.
17. Hassen and Kaser, "Klamath County Armory," 4, 7–8.
18. *Ibid.*, 7–8.
19. DeBlander, "History of the 1935 Klamath County Armory," 13.
20. See Eva Weber, *Art Deco in America* (New York: Bison Books, 1985), 12, quoted in Curran, "Winona City Hall."
21. Curran, "Winona City Hall," section 8, p. 2, 12–15.
22. Perrin used local brick in many of his designs. DeBlander, "History of the 1935 Klamath County Armory," 35. The original brick making machine is on display at the Klamath County Museum.
23. "Preparations Complete for Armistice Day Celebration," *Evening Herald*, November 9, 1935, p. 1, 2.
24. *Evening Herald*, October 2, 1935, 2.

25. *Evening Herald*, February 10, 1942 (Savoldi); *Herald and News*, February 7, 1950 (Gorgeous Gus, Wrestling Bear); *Herald and News*, October 26, 1943 (judo); Wrestler vs. Reptile advertisement *Herald and News*, April 30, 1958, p. 12; *Herald and News*, March 31, 1957 (promoters); *Herald and News* January 2, 1958, p.1, and *Herald and News*, April 20, 1958, p. 3-A (Britton and Hawkins).
26. Judith Hassen interview with George Demetrakos, 2001, interview transcript held by the author. Demetrakos is a Klamath Falls local who served in World War II along with many of his friends, all of whom played basketball and boxed and spent much of their youth in the Klamath Armory.
27. The Golden Gloves program (1928 –present) promotes amateur boxing in the United States and has produced the majority of competitors for America’s boxing teams in the Pan-Am and Olympic Games. Sheilah DeBlander interview with Rudy Carlson and Sharon Carlson, tape recording, Klamath Falls, Oregon, April 17, 1945, cited in DeBlander, “History of the 1935 Klamath County Armory.” *Herald and News*, April 14, 1950 (Ralph Weiser).
28. *Evening Herald*, February 23, 1940, (Ellington); *Evening Herald*, July 12, 1956 (“Fats” Domino); *Herald and News*, September 26, 1956 (Little Richard); *Herald and News*, August 25, 1957 (Chuck Berry).
29. According to advertisements in the *Herald and News*, such as one printed on February 17, 1944, servicemen were admitted for free or half price.
30. *Herald and News*, March 1, 1938 (Polack Bros.); and DeBlander interview with Rudy Carlson and Sharon Carlson. The *Evening Herald* in February and March of 1938 had numerous articles about the forthcoming Shrine Circus with headlines such as the one on February 28, “Jumbo, Performing Elephant to Appear in Shrine Circus at Armory.”
31. *Herald and News*, March 11, 1954, March 3, 1954, and March 13, 1952 (crab feed advertisements and photographs); “Fireman’s Ball — Celebrate the New Year” *Herald and News*, December 31, 1952; *Herald and News*, October 3, 1966 (Mark Hatfield ice cream social); and Donoval L. “Jack” Nicol and Amy Thompson, *Bill Kitt: From Trail Driver to Cowboy Hall of Fame* (Caldwell, ID, Caxton Printers, Ltd., 2009), 149.
32. *Herald and News*, February 4, 1948, and February 9, 1950 (boy scouts); *Evening Herald*, December 27, 1950 (ice frolics); *Herald and News*, February 8, 1951 (adult basketball leagues). Many club activities and events are documented in photographs held at the Klamath County Museum.
33. Warren W. Aney, “History of the Klamath Falls National Guard Unit and Armory,” Prepared for Oregon Military Department, April 2004, p. 2.
34. National Defense Act, 1916.
35. *Evening Herald*, September 21, 1940, 1; and Judith Hassen interview with Ivan Eccles, 2001, Klamath County Museum, transcript held by author. Eccles was a National Guardsman from Klamath Falls during WWII who was transferred to a tank unit in North Africa when the National Guard decided they no longer needed as many people at Fort Stevens.
36. *The Klamath News*, October 3, 1941, p.1; and *Herald and News*, September 26, 1946, 1.
37. Hassen interview with Ivan Eccles.
38. *Evening Herald*, October 17, 1940; Klamath County Defense Council Papers, Oregon State Archives, Salem, Oregon; Charles A. Sprague, message to osg (Oregon State Guard), “Oregon State Defense Force History,” 1, <http://www.orsdf.org/history.htm> (accessed November 5, 2014).
39. Dorothy Laurenson Ebbett, “Klamath Commandos,” *The Journal of the Shaw Historical Library* 7 (1993): 1–27.
40. Oregon Governor Charles A. Sprague, Message to osg (Oregon State Guard), Oregon State Defense Force History, <http://www.orsdf.org/history.htm> (accessed November 5, 2014).
41. Carrol B. Howe, *Frontier Stories of the Klamath Country* (Klamath Falls, Ore.: C.B. Howe, 1989), 146; and Aney, “History of the Klamath Falls National Guard Unit,” 1.
42. Super, Miller, and Hylton, *Still Serving*, 1.
43. Judith Hassen conversation with Carol Mattos, February 2013.
44. Museum conversion records are held at the Klamath County Museum.
45. Event records and images held by the author and the Klamath County Museum.